FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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The purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

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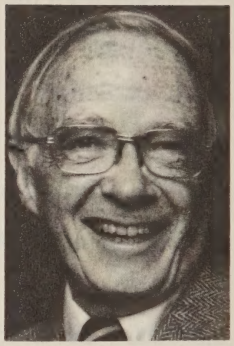
Cover photograph by Robert F. Campbell: California; Mirror Lake in Yosemite National Park.



Recently, I viewed "Peace Like a River"—a video tape of the Parliament of the World's Religions, which took place last year in Chicago.

The video brought back all the color and excitement and hope of that wonderful and inspiring event. I was particularly moved, again, by the passion of the Christian monk, Brother Wayne Teasdale, as he sat beside the Dalai Lama and spoke of the intense suffering of the Tibetan people at the hands of the People's Republic of China.

Yet, while the world—even the planet itself—writhes in agony from the escalating violence in society and in ourselves, we yearn for a world of peace and harmony that we dimly sense was originally ours and that can be regained if only we can find the way.

Brother Wayne tells us that such a paradise—a universal society of nonviolence and spirituality, a culture of peace and love—is not only possible but inevitable. He believes that both the desire and the possibility are innate in the human species and that we have reached a stage in the evolutionary process where we have a unique opportunity to bring about a new "Universal Civilization: a civilization with a heart."

Nonviolence is at the center of this vision and spirituality is its soul. "Nonviolence is the active living out of peace," Brother Wayne says, "Nonviolence in thought, word and deed, means a sensitivity towards all life, a respect and reverence for life, without exception." Nonviolence towards ourself, our family, our neighbors and all of creation, is "rich and all-embracing as a virtue, an attitude, a habit and a value. It is at once an active commitment to nonharming in any form, whether physical, emotional, intellectual, social, economic, political, or spiritual. Nonviolence, at heart, is love.

"Spirituality," says Brother Wayne, "is the soul of this coming civilization, and will animate it. For it is spirituality that unites us all on the deepest level of our being. The spirituality of humankind transcends all formal religion and emphasizes the awareness of unity as the essence of enlightenment, whether conceived or experientially understood as *Advaita, Nirvana, Dzogchen, Satori, Fana,*, or the Unitive Life. This intense

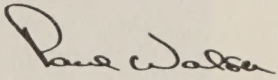
and ultimate awareness of unity, of inter-relatedness with all of creation, is the ground of genuine solidarity and peace among and between all beings and all nations.

"Solutions to our problems," Brother Wayne insists, "must originate in and flow from the heart, from an inner change of attitude and direction. Although the intellect will make its contribution," he says, "our problem is not one of understanding. We all grasp the crisis of our planet in its many facets. Our problem, rather, is one of a *will* to change." A change that must then be projected out into the world and reflected in our words, deeds, and actions.

Together, the religions of the world face the immense challenge and opportunity of inspiring this "will to change" in the human family. The role of the world's religious will be to make nonviolence and love the heart of their teaching and of their own actions in the world. To meet this challenge, Brother Wayne says, "the emergence of a permanent forum for the world's religions is an absolute necessity and an urgent responsibility to which, I believe, the Spirit calls us in our time of monumental transition."

Brother Wayne feels strongly that all of us who wish to help build a new civilization based on nonviolence and love must work to see that the Parliament, or some similar community of the world's religions, becomes a permanent reality. Much depends, he believes, on our success.

A good way to start would be to gather together in your home a group of friends and neighbors to view and discuss the video "Peace Like a River."* It will be an exciting and stimulating evening!



Paul Walsh

*For a review of "Peace Like a River" and information on how to get it, see page 46 of this issue.

Once in awhile a book comes along with poems so beautiful they are truly prayers. Stephen Mitchell's new book, *The Psalms,* has that kind of beauty. Reading it one gains the sense that everything in life is purposeful and even the worst of times can be radiant with God's presence.

Basing his poems on 50 of the Old Testament's most beloved Psalms, Mitchell echoes the spirit of the Psalter with familiar images and comforting insights. The crucial Biblical theme of unwavering faith is almost a refrain: "Even in the midst of great pain, O Lord, I praise You for that which is."

The following poem, typically lovely, is based on Psalm Four.

Unnameable God, how measureless
  is your power on all the earth
  and how radiant in the sky!
When I look up at your heavens
  the work of your fingers,
  the moon and the multitude of stars,
what is man, that you love him,
  and woman, that you gladden her heart?
Yet you made us almost like the angels
  and crowned us with understanding.
You put is in charge of all creatures
  and placed your whole earth in our hands:
all animals, tame and wild,
  all forests, fields, and deserts,
even the pure air of the sky,
  even the depths of the ocean.
Unnamable God, how terrible
  is our power on all the earth!*

Readers of any faith or no faith at all cannot help find the Spirit in this book.

Mary Ford-Grabowsky

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Robert F. Campbell

Life in the dimension of Spirit is a mystery rooted in the joy of being. The wonderful beauty of prayer is that the opening of our heart is as natural as the opening of a flower. To let a flower open and bloom it is only necessary to let it be. So if we simply are, if we become and remain still and silent, our heart cannot but be open; the Spirit cannot but pour through into our whole being. It is this that we have been created for.

John Main OSB

One of the most important—and most neglected—elements in the beginning of the interior life is the ability to respond to reality, to see the value and the beauty in ordinary things, to come alive to the splendor that is all around us.

Thomas Merton

One day Francis was filled with joy because he was beginning to enjoy God in all creatures. He went through the streets singing and inviting everyone to sing along with him. Then he came upon an almond tree, and he said, "Brother Almond, speak to me of God." And the almond tree blossomed.

A Franciscan legend

I am depressed.
yet if I live on,
there may still come a time
to recall today fondly,
Longingly, as a day bygone.

Fujiwara no Kiyosuke

God will take the place of mother and father for you. God will be your consolation, your virtue, and in the end the reward for your love.

Vincent de Paul

Praise God, sun and moon,
praise God, shining stars,
praise God, highest heavens, and waters above the heavens!
Let them all praise the name of God,
at whose word they were created.

Ps. 148.3-5

Loves never ends.

I Cor. 13.8

What Suffering Has to Teach Us

JIM DREAVER

Even the hardest realities of the spiritual path can be meaningful.

Life is suffering, the Buddha taught. To be human is to suffer. Yet it is also a very human thing to try to avoid suffering. We all have our distractions and escapes, our ways of going unconscious, of blocking out what we don't want to see or feel. I don't need to go into them here.

There are times though when we find ourselves caught up in an experience of suffering that is so intense, so painfully real, that we can no longer ignore it. And this is what I want to address in this article—the suffering that can no longer be denied. The suffering that must, finally, be dealt with. For suffering has a lot to teach us about what it means to be a whole person, if we would but embrace it consciously and open ourselves to learning the lesson it is trying to teach us.

How then do you embrace pain and suffering consciously? There is no formula for it, that's for sure. There is nothing rational or logical about the painful and confused feelings that let you know you are suffering. If the suffering is really bad, even all the spiritual understanding you may have acquired over the years doesn't do much good. If you are normally a fairly calm, secure, and easygoing person, and then have had something devastating happen to you—like having your heart broken in a relationship—you will know what I mean. When your insides are in turmoil, your heart is shattered, and your whole being racked with grief, nothing you thought you knew before makes any difference. All you are aware of is the blinding feeling of loss—of pain, hurt, betrayal.

But, paradoxically, there is a spiritual wisdom that can help in such situations, though it has little to do with words. It is the wisdom that comes to us from the great spiritual traditions, both of the East and the West. It is the wisdom of compassion. Compassion means, "to be with suffering." In spiritual work we speak a lot about the importance of having compassion for others. Yet compassion has to begin at home. We

Jim Dreaver D.C., is a chiropractor practicing in Sebastopol, CA. He teaches other health professionals seminars on somatics, a method for releasing chronic muscle tension and enhancing mind/body awareness.

Robert F. Campbell

cannot feel genuine compassion toward others until we are able to first feel it for ourselves.

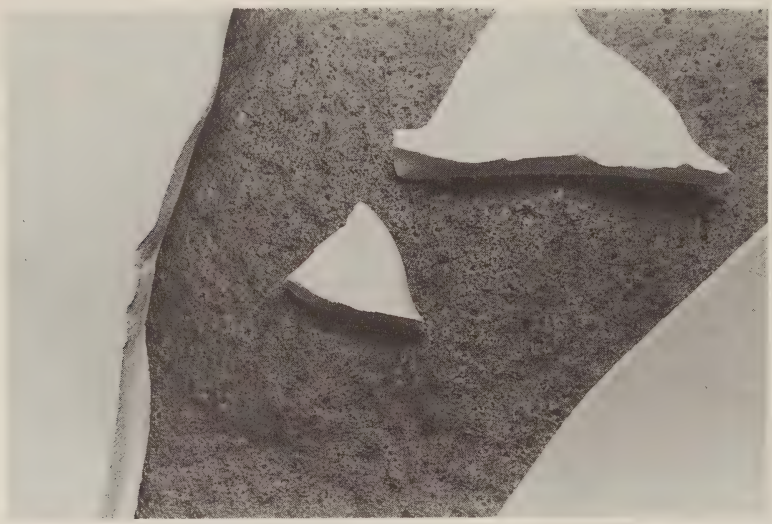
Compassion, then, is allowing the feelings to be there. It is not judging or criticizing yourself for having the thoughts and feelings that are being stirred up by the pain you are in. It doesn't matter whether you are suffering over a relationship, a disease or physical problem, finances, or something to do with your work or career. The feelings you are experiencing, along with the thoughts, fears and images flashing through your mind, happen to be the particular way you are reacting to the painful situation you find yourself in. Your thoughts may not make sense, your behavior may not be very "enlightened," you may well be failing to see the larger picture, but the fact is that, right now, you are in pain. You are suffering.

Begin, then, by accepting the fact that you are in pain. You must allow yourself to feel it. Go off in private to do this, if you must, or allow yourself to be held by a friend, someone you trust. But feel your pain. Acknowledge your fear. Cry your tears. Let yourself be upset, angry. Get in touch with your sadness, the deep hurt inside you. Let go of all thoughts and judgments, all "shoulds" and "oughts" and open your heart to yourself.

Don't make yourself wrong for feeling the way you do. You are a human being struggling for wholeness. You must allow yourself to feel the pain of your brokenness, the fact that you don't have it all together.

Be vulnerable with yourself. Don't make yourself wrong for feeling the way you do. You are a human being, struggling for wholeness. You must allow yourself to feel the pain of your brokenness, the fact that you don't have it all together, and that, yes, you are afraid.

Feel it all, then. As Jean Klein, one of my teachers, said, "Welcome your experience." Feel your suffering, but don't get mired in it. How do you tell the difference between genuine feeling and getting mired? When you are feeling something, you are just feeling it. You are in your body, you are in sensation, you are in the here-now experience of it. But if you are in your head, thinking about how bad things are and how miserable



Tom Dunham

your life is, painting bleak pictures and getting lost in all the horrible scenarios that might happen, then you are beginning to get mired.

It's normal to get lost in your thoughts and fears at first, but resist the temptation to carry it on for too long. Otherwise you're just fueling your suffering. You are feeding it, keeping it alive. The more able you are to have compassion for yourself, and stay with the feelings—without getting caught up in the confusion in your mind—the sooner the feelings will pass. Feelings are just energy, and energy is always moving in the direction of wholeness, of harmony. Don't interfere with an emotional process by getting caught up in trying to intellectually understand it, and your emotions will have their natural expression. Sooner or later things will quiet down.

It is in the relative peace and quiet that follows a bout of intense suffering that you can begin to get some perspective on what is happening to you. You can begin to learn from your suffering by asking yourself, for example, "What is this trying to teach me? What is my lesson here?" I've personally found this to be one of the most effective ways of dealing with any unwanted but persisting situation or problem that is a source of suffering. It's taking the view that the problem keeps coming back precisely because it is trying to tell us something, and we just haven't gotten the message yet.

Now, for every person, and every situation, the lesson is unique and

personal, so no one can learn yours for you. A compassionate and perceptive friend may see what you are struggling with, and even give you advice as to what you ought to be looking at. But unless you see it for yourself, unless you feel the truth of what you need to learn so that it moves you in your heart and soul, all the words about it won't make any difference. Nevertheless, as a guide, here are a few "lessons" that I have discovered to be universally true. There are ones we all need to learn.

1. The man or woman you are seeking to make you whole is an illusion. You must find him or her within yourself, through learning to integrate your own masculine and feminine energies. The more you awaken to your own inner wholeness-which is really a spiritual awakening—the more you will find yourself attracting others into your life who are on the same wave-length as you.

2. Learn to open you heart, to trust and be vulnerable, especially when you're in pain. Otherwise, if you harden yourself (which is the ego trying to protect itself), it will just bring you more suffering. Remember the lines from the *Tao Te Ching*: "The hard and stiff will be broken, the soft and supple will prevail."

3. Nothing worthwhile happens without commitment. When you commit yourself wholeheartedly to something—to your own healing and transformation, to a relationship, a career, a project—the creative power of life itself begins to work in your favor. Miracles, small and large, become a daily event, and your life feels increasingly moved by Grace.

4. The happiness that comes from favorable circumstances is always subject to change. Stop focussing so much on trying to control what's "out there", and give more attention to clearing out your mental and emotional conditioning—the "baggage" that gets in the way of your living fully in the present. Then your thoughts and actions will have more clarity and energy, and things will happen more easily for you.

5. You have to live in the world. Be in your body, be in your life. Feel it all—the pain and the joy. Learn to dance with the ups and downs. Remember where true abundance comes from—God, consciousness, the love that has created you. Discover the silence that lies

beyond your mind, and you'll touch the source of that love. It will change your life.

6. Think less about what you can get, and more about what you can give. Consider Albert Schweitzer's words: "The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

I'd like to conclude with something a friend gave me—a beautiful statement of what it means to embrace suffering, and live a conscious, growth-oriented life:

> And yet who of you knew the full implications
> of what it meant to cry for wholeness?
> To know truth?
> And yet all of you knew it was unalterably your true path,
> and chose it willingly and surely, however blindly.
> So it is for humanity now, and those of you who can must
> sing the song of peace, and light the way home.

Here's How You Can Help Your Pastor

Many readers tell us they were introduced to *FIP* by their pastors, when they were in need of spiritual comfort and help.

We think most pastors would welcome *FIP*—if only they knew about it—as a spiritual resource that could help them minister to their congregations—especially those with troubled hearts and minds.

If you think *Fellowship in Prayer* would be a help to your pastor, just write his or her name and address on the envelope insert in this issue and mail it to us. We'll send a copy in your name. You may well be helping quite a few of the more troubled members of your congregation.

The World Fellowship of Religions Conference

ART STEIN

Continuing in the spirit of the World Parliament of Religions, another landmark international gathering took place in Delhi, India during the first week of February. People from around the world came to take part in the World Fellowship of Religions Conference which happily coincided with the birth Centennial celebrations for India's Sant Kirpal Singh.

A leading theme throughout the week was the role of prayer and meditation in peacebuilding, within the individual and the broader society. I'd like to provide a flavor of the gathering by highlighting two major events.

Many bright banners and posters around downtown Delhi heralded the Peace March of February 3. For the participants it was a truly spirited walk for peace, a joyful procession, a pilgrimage.

Men and women came from every continent to take part in the celebrations. They joined thousands of others from the Indian subcontinent, in a fellowship of love, unity and peace, to honor the memory of Sant Kirpal Singh, a great torchbearer of human unity in our age.

Hundreds of thousands lined the streets that morning to watch the procession slowly wind its way through Chandni Chowk, the crowded center of old Delhi, to the historic Red Fort, which dates back to the Mogul era.

First came six elephants. Draped over the back of each was a large brightly colored cloth, symbolic of one of India's major religious traditions. Bands played and groups of perky Indian school children and civic and religious organizations followed. Africans, Asians, Europeans, South and North Americans and Australians, some wearing traditional costume of their native lands, walked behind such banners as "Delegates from Oceania." Some carried signs identifying their own country—Ecuador, Belgium, Russia, Pakistan—or peace messages appropriate for the occasion. There was no stridency in the march, and people moved freely at times to walk under other country banners and to share fellowship with old and new friends.

A poet, author and journalist, Dr. Arthur Stein is vitally involved in peace work on an international basis.

Toward the middle of the long procession, high above the crowd atop a flower-bedecked motorized vehicle-platform stood Sant Rajinder Singh, President of the World Fellowship of Religions, and several dozen representatives of the planet's major religious and spiritual traditions. They smiled warmly, waved to the joyful assemblage, and responded to the peoples' waves and cheers.

Years earlier Sant Kirpal Singh had once been asked to sum up the essence of his life's message, and had responded simply: "Be good, do good, be one." Now, as the vehicle bearing the religious teachers moved forward, clusters of people called out in unison, Ek Bano, and those across the way echoed back the same words. In Hindi the words Ek Bano mean "Be one." The chant resounded back and forth in the charged atmosphere as the people surged forward to get a closer glimpse.

At each major house of worship along the way—two temples, a mosque, a gurdwara and a church—the procession stopped for a few moments as the leaders paid their respects. It was heartening to witness Hindus, Moslems, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Jews and others, religious leaders and laity alike, reaffirming through shared prayer their

Cliff Moore

growing commitment to work for mutual respect and interfaith unity within India and throughout this strife-torn planet.

At the Red Fort a veritable sea of people gathered to participate in the inaugural event. In his presidential address Sant Rajinder Singh noted that "at the heart of each religion is an emphasis on prayer and meditation as the primary way to achieve peace both within and without. The conference aims at finding the unifying factors at the core of each religion as a bridge between all (people)."

Indeed this theme had been the focus of an intensive dialogue which had been held the previous two days at Kirpal Ashram in Delhi as a prologue to the public programs. About 45 participants from over 20 countries, representative of practically all of the world's faith traditions, took part in the discussions on the "Role of Prayer and Meditation in Fostering Non-Violence and Peace, Within the Individual and Throughout the World."

The significance of this focus was not overlooked. As Dr. Mohammed Shaalan, a teacher of psychiatry at a leading Egyptian university and one of the facilitators of the dialogue remarked, "I have attended numerous interfaith conferences, but this is the first that focused on meditation and prayer as the way to non-violence, world peace and unity." Shaalan's own faith embraces both the Coptic and Islamic traditions.

I have attended numerous interfaith conferences, but this is the first that focused on meditation and prayer as the way to non-violence, world peace and unity.

Not only did the delegates exchange ideas, but they got to know one another at a heart-to-heart level. Each of the six sessions began and ended with a prayer and/or meditation led by a practitioner of that tradition. Thus we learned in a participatory way something of the prayer life of 12 major spiritual traditions. Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan led us in Sufi meditation, and our host, Sant Rajinder Singh, shared with us the meditative approach of the Science of Spirituality. Father Luis Dolan of the Temple of Understanding and Mary Evelyn Jegen, United nations representative of Pax Christi, provided nurturing prayer in the

Christian tradition, and Heraldo de la Rocha taught an indigenous Afro-Brazilian prayer and meditation in movement, helping us to get more in touch with our Mother Earth. Acharya Sushil Kumar, a prominent Jain teacher, led us in meditative chants.

A touching moment came when Rabbi Avraham Soetendorp, President of the Global Forum, shared prayers together with Ms. Sona Khan, Advocate of the Supreme Court of India. The Rabbi began with a psalm of King David and his new Islamic friend responded with another psalm in Hebrew.

Within this framework the spiritual dialogue addressed key questions such as, "How can prayer and meditation lead to world peace?" "What have individuals and groups been doing towards this end?" "What can be done after the conference ends to keep the impetus going?" Some of the areas explored related to how spirituality, in the broadest sense of the word, could have a positive effect in the health-care, business, educational and political arenas.

One practical proposal which came forward from one of the groups advocating the creation of a United nations Center for Non-Violent Conflict Prevention and Resolution. Among those involved in the work of preventative diplomacy and mediation at the international, regional and community levels would be volunteers from faith-based communities. Much conflict today has roots in ethnic and religious intolerance and misunderstanding, and the religious leadership and laity can do much to help mediate and heal these wounds.

Some delegates told us of encouraging programs which were already being put into practice. For example, Ella Cisneros of Venezuela, president of the Together Foundation, told us how Together Net, a communications network system, now serves environmental, human rights and sustainable development needs of people in over 50 countries. And former Colombian diplomat, Dr. Carlos Lozano, related the encouraging news that a group which he began now is teaching to Columbian school children and other non-sectarian forms of meditation and values-oriented studies, including groups of police officers and prisoners.

Father Maximilian Mizzi, pioneer of the interfaith movement within the Franciscan Order, called out attention to the source of our energies:

> Today we are beginning/living a new process . . . It is a gift of God that we are meeting not to fight but to pray with each other and to help each other. God does not only live in heaven, God is close to each one of us; God is within us.

This gentle monk from Assisi, Italy, remained at Kirpal Ashram well after the Conference ended, informally continuing on a personal level the spiritual dialogue between East and West.

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama of Tibet was among the many spiritual luminaries who spoke at the major public program held on February sixth to remember the birthday and life of Sant Kirpal Singh. Speaking before over 100,000 people, the Dalai Lama said that he was grateful for there being so many different religions in the world but that we need to remember our shared humanity.

> All religions, regardless of differing philosophies, have the ability to increase compassion, have the potential to help and serve humanity . . . Religion means not just words, but love in action . . . Followers of religions must try to develop inner peace and purity, in order to help others.

Sitting at home back in the USA two months after the events in India, and reflecting on many warm memories, I find this thought emerge: To what extent have we been preaching to the converted? How do we reach out and share with those within religious traditions who are suspicious of interfaith dialogue, or with the many people who are outside the faith traditions?

In truth we can only speak for ourselves. As a long-time student and teacher in international relations I have sought to explore ways in which the diverse peoples of our beautiful planet can find common ground and learn to live together peacefully. For a number of years I was uncertain about how prayer and meditation could help in resolving the complex global issues which beset humankind, but it has slowly dawned on me that the key is for more and more people to personally experience what it means to "tap within." We need to have a personal recognition that all people and life forms are interconnected within the delicately spun web of life. This recognition of what Thich Nhat Hanh calls *inter-being* can spark the beginnings of personal transformation for many people across the planet, which can then lead to transformed families, and societal transformation, from the community to the transnational level.

Through prayer and meditation we can enter the inner realms of which saints and sages of all the world's religious and spiritual traditions speak. As the Indian poet, Sant Darshan Singh, wrote in one of his verses of universal love:

> When the flowers of the church, mosque and temple come together;
> Spring will blossom forth in Your garden, O Lord.

Ask Angela

BARBARA ACKERMAN

Do you have a question of the heart or spirit that needs attention? Angela, our canine sage-in-residence, would love to help. Please write to her in care of FiP, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542, and she will give you her answer in our next issue.

Dear Angela,

How do we maintain a spirit of generosity during financially difficult times, when we may be feeling that we don't even have enough for ourselves? Thank you.

Sincerely,
Penny Pinch

Dear Penny,

Thank you for taking time to write to me. I appreciate the opportunity this question of yours gives me to discuss this important subject.

Here is a fine example of a question which poses a dilemma for me, the growing guru who would like to appear more generous than I actually am. Let me say at the outset that unlike grooming and greeting, which I am really great about, being generous is something I'm growing into.

Let me begin by saying that I think there may actually be times in our lives when it is wiser to be guarded and protective about our things. There may be a good reason to ration what we have. Being stingy may be appropriate and certainly understandable. Feeling like you do not have enough or that you're just about to run out of something you love and need can be terribly scary. When we feel threatened and frightened, it is very hard to feel and be generous. Once we realize our stingy feelings come from fear and nervousness about tomorrow, it's all easier to cope with and get through. Once you realize this, you can have your stingy feelings and really enjoy them—expressing your fear about running out really helps, too. Once you've acknowledged being scared and have lamented your plight, there's room available to let in some feelings of generosity again.

In my own life, there have been times when I have stared down at the last ten Kibbles in a once full food bowl. This situation has not found me at my generous best. Tough questions need to be addressed. When will someone be back? What happens if I get hungry before they do come back? When someone does come home, how long will it take them to notice that more Kibble is required? For me, ten Kibbles left is a time of care, concern, and caution. If you find yourself in a low-food-dish situation, do not berate yourself for a stingy attitude. Forgive yourself. Use the worry as an opportunity to see if there is something to be done about it.

As I have mentioned before, releasing the fear we have about not having enough is the first step we need to take before a generous spirit can grow. One of the best ways I know of releasing our fears is through howling and yowling or engaging in other satisfying and fulfilling noise-making opportunities. When my one favorite blanket is being washed, I often pace in an agitated manner and howl mournfully throughout most of the rinse and spin cycles. Whimpering works well during drying time and by the time my blanket is returned to me, the pacing and noise-making has consoled me so well that a generous spirit takes over.

Sometimes when I'm fluffing up the folds of my blanket or licking my paws, I like to offer up a little prayer—I ask for a shift in attitude.

Here are some other techniques I've used successfully in building up a generous spirit at a low-food-bowl period.

During lean times, show extra kindness to yourself—indulge in pleasant occupations that make you feel good about yourself and life. My personal favorites are nail-nipping and fur-licking. Often I like to sit under my favorite bush in the backyard. Here I make a mental list of all those I'll be sharing some Cheerios with just as soon as there is plenty to spare. While you're making your own list of those you'll let share your extra Kibble, keep in mind that at some point we all need to stop counting and trust that there is enough.

Sometimes when we are feeling our most stingy, that may very well be just the time to have a long, luxurious stretch and act in the most generous manner you can muster. You might try sharing a few of those

last ten Kibbles—if not, you can do what I have done: offer one corner of your favorite blanket to another soul to sit down upon and keep you company. Or, you might find a soul who needs some time, or attention. Then you might sit quietly beside them on the couch, and even perhaps place one paw on their arm.

Whenever I have extended myself personally to my buddy, the feeling of warmth and kindness I have given out has a magical way of bouncing back to me. Therefore I suggest that you find opportunities to offer another soul first, just the very thing you feel you want to receive.

Sometimes when I'm fluffing up the folds of my blanket or licking my paws, I like to offer up a little prayer—I ask for a shift in my attitude. The new attitude says I am complete. All that I have is plenty. Inside I have all that I need. I will say that this little prayer doesn't actually pour more Kibble into the bowl, but it sure makes the waiting more comforting and consoling.

Also, the notion that whatever we truly need will be provided is a notion worth chewing on while your own blanket is in the dryer.

Finally, as a reminder to us all, I leave here the law of never-ending Kibble supply: When the bowl is empty, someone will pour more Kibble in so that the bowl is full once more—unless, of course, they've forgotten the dog food and pour out a full bowl of Cheerios instead.

To all of you longing to feel more generous, even in the face of adversity, I hope I have been of some help and hope.

Faithfully,
Angela

Dear Friends and Fans,

Do you often search your magazine rack for an old Angela column that you can't quite locate? Where *is* that column on loneliness when you really need it?

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FORERUNNER

Give me one more
locust dipped in honey
golden sweet, golden honey.

So, you heard he healed some
fed some, perplexed wise fools
and encouraged weak ones.

Now, John, you just stay
in these desert hills
Your God is a wilderness-wanderer
not a street-walker.

Don't let your cousin-blood
lure you. Your mother,
his mother. Women!
Mothers always think
their first born sons
are too special.

Dann Ward

MARY'S DEW

The dew is no excuse
for not walking in the garden
with me. I slept with you,
did I not? I know what
they say about me:

> She was so bold as to wash
> his feet with her unchaste tears.*

And, now, he sleeps
in the cold rock, and you
are ashamed to be seen
with me, even if it's only
the Roman soldiers and, maybe,
a priest or two who just may know
a harlot when they see one.

Very well, I'll let God
wash my feet as I walk.
I'm due at least that much,
if no more. I go without you.

(So, a harlot, an ex-harlot, the same,
we greet the sun, alone.)

*Cf. Luke 7.36-50

Dann Ward

MICHIGAN'S WINTER PSALMS

When Michigan's whittle-sharp winds
knifed through winter coat and cap,
I could always escape into the summer
of grandfather's greenhouse. No need
to shiver till March melted our ice age.

Just a step through the greenhouse door
and it was suddenly spring.
A few more steps down the main aisle
brought me to the tropics of the palm house,
a paradise for a young boy's serious play.

There beneath a bench of ferns
close to searing-hot pipes,
mounds of stored sand that could be shaped
by imagination, watering can, and busy hands
into a world of hills, castles and caves.

No serpent in this lush Eden, though a relic
of ancient suffering waited not far away.
At the west end, beyond the palms,
a living image of age-old cruelty and hate
that sometimes haunted my dreams.

From a wooden tub by the wall,
writhing out of dry earth, a tangle
of tan-colored branches sprouting clumps
of leaves and innocent pink flowers—
a crown of thorns!

No jeering crowds here, only silence,
yet some days I felt I had to walk
those last few steps from Palm Sunday
to Golgotha's cross, to experience
with thumb against thorn that stab of pain.

Only then could I turn once more
to my world beneath the ferns
and slowly blur the nightmare vision
by soothing my bloodied thumb
with the balm of moist sand.

Even now those long-ago steps
from joyous palms to piercing thorn
make the Friday vigil of crucifix and crown
not just words, but blood and pain.
Still more deeply felt is the miracle—
God's forgiveness.
Richard Bauerle

SONGS

Walk the cemeteries of this country
in summer, and it will be hard
to leave, for while you are part
of the living, you are drawn
to those who died before
you, in their stone brooding, adorned
with irises and geraniums, lending
comfort to the small granite risings
in the earth.

The peace of these places
is in many books,
as are the visits of the living
to them short-lived; their return
to harried routine is an imperative
ritual of denial
against death.

You linger longer than most among
these miniature skyscrapers to hear the bubbling

call of the house wren in the morning,
as the sun crawls through the moist
grass and lays its yellow blanket
over the cold, dead stones.

The incessant starlings' chatter
from the maples reminds you of haggling
women and street vendors
at mid-day.

Sometimes you walk here at dusk to witness
the whip-poor-will's lullaby to the slowing
of the day's heat, and, if you wait to catch
the moon's rising, the beholding
of a red glow from the singer's eyes, made
radiant by the song's Promise.

Martha Townley

Dann Ward's poetry has been published in the U.S., England, Canada, and Japan. He lives with his wife and nine-year-old son (a published poet himself) in Pennsylvania.

Richard F. Bauerle is an Emeritus Professor of Humanities at Ohio Wesleyan University. His poems have appeared in Thoreau Quarterly Journal, Kaleidoscope, Northwest Passage, CEA Critic, Penguin, *and many other periodicals.*

Martha Townley has published her poetry in journals such as Pegasus, The Sherborn Writers, *and* The Journal of the Longfellow Society.

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What would you like to tell us about your spiritual needs, desires, experiences? About *Fellowship in Prayer*? Use the space below!

How Do You Give a Life?

WILLIAM M. STEPHENS

The desire for a life in the Spirit is not a promise of perfection.

Even as a child, I felt uncomfortable about some of the things our preacher said. We had only two choices, he told us. We could give our lives to God, or we could burn in hell eternally.

That's when I became a religious skeptic. "What kind of God would treat people like garbage?" I asked myself. Would a God of love burn people the way you burn a pile of trash, and watch them burn day after day and year after year—for eternity? Besides, why would God *want* my life after having given it to me?

At about age ten I developed these serious doubts about God's moral values. But I wasn't quite ready to give up on religion. My mother insisted I go to church, so I tried to accept the church's teachings. One Sunday when the preacher raised his hands and invited us sinners to come down front and be saved, I stood up and went down front. The preacher clasped my hand and told me what to say, and I said it.

So I was baptized, and I felt the warm glow of God's Love in my heart. But it didn't last long. I wasn't ready for salvation yet. I still had a lot of living and loving and lying and dying to do. The glow faded and I lost my way. Decades later, after the agony of separation became unbearable, I found my way back.

This time I really found God (or rather God found me), and I didn't need the help of a preacher. God's grace came to me beneath the coconut palms behind a secluded beach on the tropical Atlantic Ocean. The sound of the surf was God's voice whispering a benediction, and the fresh sea breeze was God's kiss upon my lips. I guess you'd call it a near-death experience, for I actually thought I had died. I experienced incredible energy, vistas, and peace. And when I came back, it was as if I'd been reborn—like a new soul starting out afresh with the radiant Christ walking alongside holding my hand.

Well over a half-century has passed since I first tried to do what the

Bill Stephens, an attorney with a Social Security disability practice, lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

preacher told me to do—to give my life to God. But even today, after all this time, I still don't know how a person can actually give a life to God.

If you take the proposition seriously, it's not a simple matter. First of all, is it your life to give? And even if it *is*, how do you give a life? Do you give it all at once, or do you give it piecemeal? And after you have given it, is it still yours?

Also, is there any way really of knowing *what* you are giving? To me, it seems simplistic to think you can give something away that you don't own and don't even have much control over.

It's easy enough to say the words, of course. I said the words when I was ten, and I thought I meant it. But that didn't stop me from living a life of self-centered loneliness while fighting one addiction after another, until I developed the one addiction that cures all others—the addiction to God, which can turn the drabbest life into a divine romance.

But no matter how hard I try, I cannot give my life to God. I can't even give an entire *day* to God. An entire morning perhaps, under ideal conditions, or an entire evening. But a whole *day*? Impossible, it seems to me. In fact, from my experience, it is hard to give *one full hour* to God. (However, when I'm at a spiritual retreat or on a pilgrimage, I can give a sizeable segment of a day to God. But even then I am subject to moods, thoughts, words or acts that are not always pure, godly, or selfless.)

Have you actually considered what it means to give an entire *day* to God? To me, it means giving every moment of the day; thinking of God constantly; trying to see God in every person; accepting every word and sound as the voice of God, and all happenings as God's Will manifesting in my life.

It means I should endeavor to let God activate my vocal cords, and move my feet; to allow God to direct the gaze of my eyes, and control my fingers on the keyboard of my computer. I should try to let God speak through me each time I open my mouth.

As a lawyer who represents only people with severe mental and physical disabilities—people who are depressed and often homeless; at times suicidal, paranoid, delusional; terminally ill; some with AIDS—it is sometimes hard to stay focused on God. But the plus side is that my clients have suffered so much that, in most cases, they know they could not get through a day without God. These people are alive because of God's love, and they know it. Consequently, working with them helps keep me centered on God.

There are notable exceptions, of course. A small number of my clients are the polar opposites of the ones described above. Activated by negative emotions, they spit out sparks of rage and frustration like a burning log throws off sparks of fire. But these people, too, help me stay centered because, without God, how could I possibly deal with them?

Regardless of how my day goes, I have never been able to give more than a small part of it to God. Fortunately, though, this portion of the day seems gradually to grow as time goes on. Every time I slip away for ungodly periods of time, I come back and try a little harder, and God's compassion sustains me.

But I've had to lower my sights. Even if I can't give a day to God, I have come to realize that I can always give a moment—*this moment*. So that is now the focus of my efforts. Each time I drift away and come back, I offer that moment as a gift to the Divine Beloved. And God accepts with flowing grace, which I experienced throughout my being.

Perhaps I'm a slow learner. In all these years I have not learned how to give even a substantial part of my life to God. But I *have* learned to give a moment, and to repeatedly give a moment—the *present* moment, which is the most important moment of my life. By so doing—by making the effort, day after day and moment after moment—I feel I am growing closer to the One who dwells within.

Constant reminders are necessary, and they are posted in strategic spots all over my office. Pictures of Christ, of Meher Baba, of Ramakrishna, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Teresa of Avila; various quotes from the Psalms and the Bhagavad Gita, from Meister Eckhart, St. Catherine of Siena, Kabir, Rumi, Hafiz. I have reminders on my telephone, on my computer, on my calendar, pasted to my file cabinet . . . everywhere.

Some people may think it undignified for an attorney to have religious quotes and pictures all over the office. So be it. I need all the reminders I can get. I want to be reminded, each time I glance around the room, that God has put me in this job, and all I have to do is please God and everything else will take care of itself. My clients know that God is my senior partner. And they are *glad*. Most of them also know that God loves them, and will take care of them. They feel that we are working together (as we are), and that with God's help justice will be done.

We win by the grace of God, by accepting what God gives us, and by trying to give each moment to the Eternal Beloved, who lives within the heart.

How Do I Look, Daddy?

IRENE GAVIN

"Mommy, you gotta take me to see Daddy," the little girl begged. She had just pulled the maroon plaid jumper over her head, tugged it into place, and buttoned the belt. Then she patted her braided brown hair, removing wisps of it from inside the color of her white blouse. Her eyes danced and her feet hardly stood still as she studied her reflection in the mirror. She turned to the right and then to the left.

Later in the kitchen she again pleaded with her mother. "You gotta take me to see Daddy."

"Okay, Norma, later," her harried mother answered as she quieted the crying toddler, warmed a bottle for the baby, juggled boxes of cereal and bottles of milk, and thought about the part-time job she'd try to get.

"No, Mommy. I gotta go now. I wanna show him how I look."

This was a special day. Norma had waited weeks for it. She had gotten up early. How could she possibly sleep with five older sisters rushing about getting ready for school and a tiny nephew and niece clamoring for attention? All summer she had looked forward to going to Sacred Heart School, sometimes eagerly, sometimes anxiously. Is the teacher nice? Will I have homework? What if I get sick? What if I don't like school? She'd like it, her mother assured her. She'd get homework, her sisters agreed. Plenty of it.

Almost daily she had checked the bedroom closet to make sure her uniform was still there and that the black and white shoes were too. And now she was wearing her new clothes and everybody in the family could see her. Everybody but . . .

"Okay, Norma. I'll take you to see Daddy."

They made their way along the dirt path, avoiding deep ruts. "You stay here, Mommy," Norma told her mother when they reached their destination. "I'll only be a minute." She ran a couple yards and stopped. She closed her eyes briefly then opened them. When she did, her hazel eyes twinkled. Looking down she grasped the hem of her skirt in each hand and held it out. Then she remembered her new shoes. First she extended one foot, then the other. She was sure her father liked the way she looked.

A freelance writer, Irene Gavin resides in Philadelphia

"Hurry, Norma, You'll be late for school," her mother called.

"Okay, Mommy. One more minute."

Then the little girl hurried along a small white wooden fence, past bouquets of artificial flowers forming a colorful border within, to the gray granite marker engraved, *IN LOVING MEMORY*, RAFAEL G. FRANCO, 1950-1990. She quickly brushed off the top of the stone, removing bits of twigs and leaves. "Bye, Daddy. I gotta go to school. I'll be back," she promised, and ran to her mother.

Because the morning visit had been so short, Norma did return. And since there were no more flowers in the vases at home, she and her mother stopped to buy some along the way. When they got to Evergreen Cemetery, in Camden, NJ, Norma dug a hole and planted the pink plastic roses inside the fence. As she did, she thought about her daddy, sick and often out of work. How, when he was well, he read to her and her sisters. Talked and laughed with them. Took them for walks. "I love you, Daddy," she whispered,as she stood and brushed the dust from her skirt.

Norma held her mother's hand as they left the cemetery, happy that her father had seen how she looked on her very first day of school.

Norma Franco

The Dances of Universal Peace

CAROL BIALOCK

This Roman Catholic nun is "dancing her way to a universal heart."

It has taken me four years to admit, finally, that the Dances of Universal Peace are my true worship. A group that does not claim to be a church has become the church of my soul—and heart, and feet.

For me, it started when a friend invited me to a week-end called "Dancing with the Aramaic Jesus," led by Neil Douglas-Klotz, a professor at the Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality in Oakland, California. We learned the prayer "Our Father" in Jesus' everyday language: Aramaic. And then we danced to those words. I could feel my embodied spirit saying, "This is it!" with every cell and fiber.

That was in 1989, and I have been participating in the dances once a week ever since.

The Dances of Universal Peace go back to the inspiration of a Sufi teacher, Murshid Samuel Lewis. While visiting the tomb of a Sufi saint in India, Lewis had a vision of what the Dances would be like. He presented his vision of a universal sacred folk dance to Ruth St. Denis, his great teacher, on his return to the United States. In the late sixties he formed a group of young people in San Francisco who were willing to embody his vision of dance.

The other influence that shaped his life was his Sufi teacher, Hazrat Inayat Khan, whose ideal of the "Unity of Religious Ideals" became a foundation for the Dances. Inayat Khan taught that all religions have one truth behind them, and that we should respect all the great teachers who have given their lives to the service of truth.

We dance to brief texts from all the great world religions and spiritualities. On the same evening we may go from Native American to Buddhist to Zoroastrian to Christian to Muslim to Judaic chants. We are in a circle, sometimes moving from partner to partner, sometimes singing, dancing and gesturing individually.

I've had only one "problem" with the Dances: they have brought out

Carol Bialock's service to homeless women and children has led her into women's spirituality and into ecological spirituality. She lives in San Jose, CA.

my hidden prejudices. By the third or fourth week of participation in them, a rebellion set in. Why all this repetition of "Allah" in the numerous Islamic chants? Why can't they sing songs with the word "God" more often? I'm uncomfortable. "Allah-Allah-Allah" (into the circle) "Allah-Allah-Allah" (out of the circle). So why am I, who am so broad-minded, squirming inside? Sometimes language reveals our bigotry and our prejudices.

Some years later, I discovered that the historical Jesus, in his native tongue (Aramaic), called God "Alaha," which is much closer to "Allah" than the name "God." But long before making that discovery, the repeated movements, repeated songs, changed me. Rituals lead to belief. By letting the beauty of Islamic chants get into my vocal cords, feet, arms, legs, I also let "Allah" into my heart. And into my heart also came Great Spirit of the native Americans, Krishna of India, Yahweh of Israel and holy Asha, the Zoroastrian archangel of light.

By the second year I was hooked. I especially loved Native American dances, such as "I walk with beauty before me" (Navaho), and "The earth is my mother." Long before I studied native American spirituality I understood it from the feet and gut out, rather than from some theoretical place behind the forehead.

An element of the Dances that won me from the beginning was going from partner to partner, seeing the divine presence in each one. When the song is especially moving (such as the Irish "May the road rise with you, may the wind be always at your back"), the tear ducts open easily and healing waters flow.

Just forming the circle is a spiritual act that ushers us into a sacred time and space. In a circle we are equals, and we are strong. There is no competition, nothing to compare. Through the circle community is formed: we share, we learn from each other. Bonding among people, and between the inner and the outer, between spirit and matter, happens in circles more easily than it does when we stand in straight lines.

In a circle, we are equals, and we are strong.

In the middle of the circle sit or stand the musicians, usually a guitarist, a drummer or two, and maybe someone who weaves magic with

Tom Dunham

tambourine or rattles or flute. The musicians are unobtrusive and follow the directions of the dance leader. But their role is immensely valuable.

About two years ago I participated in a camp-out in the California woods where many dance groups came together. Imagine ninety people gathering in a circle, sheltered by redwoods. One of Murshid Sam Lewis's first disciples was there. At ninety, he was still dancing in spirit and he exhorted us: "Feel! Live! Dance! Praise God!"

A dance community is one of the most powerful energy circles in the world. Once, arriving late, I stood in the doorway watching the expression on the faces of the dancers. If devotion, love, joy can be seen with the eyes, I saw it that night. Later, I asked the group what the Dances mean to them. The answers: "They open the heart center magnificently . . . A wonderful combination of sacredness and fun" . . . "This has been my church service for 21 years now, and I still find it rejuvenating . . . The Dances bring into my whole being the peace that has always been in my heart and head."

Now, after four and a half years of dancing, I can assess what the Dances of Universal Peace have done for me:

— I have seen clearly that any religion that sets itself up as the "one true path" is misleading us. True spirituality unites us all, like an underground river that crosses all boundaries of creed and ritual.

— Any dualism that separates mind/body, spirit/matter, is simply not true. I have experienced that I am one, and that all parts of me flow together in the dance. The mystical is in my big toe as well as in my breath and hands and heart.

— Community can be built through song and dance. I have come to know the soul and spirit of many of the people I dance with. Spirit shines from the eyes and needs no long conversations.

For more information about the Dances, which possibly exist in your area: Center for the Dances of Universal Peace, PO Box 626, Fairfax, CA 94978.

Out of Isolation

KATHY DEIERLEIN

A woman who lost her mother in childhood learns how to fill the emptiness.

One day when I was feeling especially needy and alone, I picked up a book with a chapter on "Spiritual Life." This chapter asks the reader to assess spiritual problems associated with having a poor relationship with God. A relationship with God? I had heard the expression before in various Twelve Step meetings. But I had never developed an understanding or experience of it until this day.

The evaluation chart in the book asked me to rate my relationship with God on a scale of one to ten, and suggested: "You may have cut yourself off from God for a number of reasons. Perhaps you blame God for not protecting you from whatever overpowered you. You may have concluded that God cannot be depended on in times of need and that the only person you can really depend on or trust is yourself."

The words caught me off guard. As soon as I read them, feelings of loss and emptiness welled up in me—a sudden awareness of what I had been missing for so long. The "whatever-overpowered-you" part in my life was the loss of my mother when both she and I were very young. Since her death thirty years ago, I had held God responsible and carried a grudge. I spent those years priding myself on being the world's most independent woman! I had God in my life, but only to help me out occasionally, for it was I who was in control!

This sudden flash of insight was overwhelming. Typically my style is to hold the tears back as if I could defer them to a time when they will be less painful. But this time, through a gift of grace I allowed myself to cry and feel the longing for a relationship with God. I allowed myself to be ten years old again. I decided to write God a letter.

In the letter, I revisited the year leading up to my mother's death. It was a year filled with prayer and hopes for a miracle, lead by my mother whose faith was unwavering. I interpreted her faith as a promise that God would deliver a miracle. Consequently, I stood at her death bed

Kathy Deierlein teaches sociology to college students in Hamdan, Ct.

Jackie Beckett

believing—knowing—that God was responsible for this. God had failed not just me but her—the center of my universe.

I did not abandon my relationship with God overnight. In the years immediately following my mother's death, I felt cheated; losing the most important person in my world was proof that I didn't deserve to be loved or taken care of. But as I grew older, and developed an understanding of how traumatic the death of a parent can be to a child, I found myself wondering why I had to be the one to experience such a trauma. The expression, "God never gives you more than you can handle" came to infuriate me. I admitted I was at a complete loss of understanding God's will for me. Being single and having no children, I lack the components that our culture prescribes to women for happiness and fulfillment. I feel envious when I see friends who have husbands and babies, but also parents who provide them with love and support. I feel envious because I have none of these.

I have spent most of the past 30 years feeling sorry for myself, concentrating on what I don't have and what I am not. And all these years I have felt my life was a mistake.

I apologized to God for being distant. Then I asked God to help me identify my gifts and talents so that I can develop them for the purpose of contributing them to the world. Rekindling my relationship with God seemed to be driven by a need to have my life make sense and to feel that I had a place in the grander scheme of things. Then I thanked God for all the good things I could think of that I have and am.

I did not censor or edit as I wrote; I wrote furiously and the words spilled onto one page after the next. Rereading the letter helped me to see what I had been missing all these years: faith and trust in God, forgiveness of others, love, and a purpose in life.

Ever since writing that letter, I have prayed effortlessly and constantly throughout the days. From the smallest joy or problem to the largest, I find myself "checking in" with God often. Now, I ask freely for God's help before making decisions. If a feeling of peace accompanies the decision, I know God is giving me the green light. If fear or anxiety persists, I refrain from taking action. But I keep praying and eventually an option or decision emerges accompanied by a feeling of certainty that I am about to do the right thing.

Reconnecting with God through a letter was a powerful spiritual awakening because I have discovered that my purpose in life has less to

do with a grandiose career and more to do with just being loving and supportive of others. Every day I pray that the talents I've been blessed with will shine forth and be used, so that my life will reflect God's—and not just my—purpose.

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Rock Ritual XVIII: For Today be Silent

ROBERT O'ROURKE

To put greater space between our words, to use words sparingly, to not speak at all: here are the choices we can make each day.

Today I held my reliable turquoise rock toward the sun and together we welcomed a new day. I asked prayerfully:

What must I do today?
How shall I be?

The rock—or was it the ascending sun?—replied:

For today
be silent.
Use words wisely
if at all.

In that moment when the earth first feels warmth I remembered the well-advised words of my favorite author, Carl Sandburg:

Let me be monosyllabic today, Lord.
. . . a crony of old men
who wash sunlight in their fingers and
enjoy slow-pacing clocks.

There have been others—Quakers—who taught me:

Speak only if you can improve
upon silence.

Sagacious Native Americans knew there were days to

Say nothing;
become like
a rock.

A writer and poet, Bob O'Rourke resides in Colorado. The illustration accompanying his article is by the Colorado artist, Lisa Smith.

Lisa Smith

Ah, there are times when I fling syllables of protest in defense of causes I believe to be worthy-of-words . . .

But, this day . . .

I shall be silent
Slow-paced
As warm, morning sunshine
on a rock.

Coping with Serious Challenges

GEERY S. HOWE

When you find you have only "a small window of time left to live," what do you do?

I was vacationing in Minnesota with my family at a group of small cabins in the north woods. Sitting on the dock while my children swam, I noticed an unusually happy older man puttering here and there on a variety of small woodworking projects. Since he was the owner of the place, his puttering was not of concern, but I was intrigued by his unique degree of unconditional joy. Finally one afternoon, he asked if I could help him in the shop for a moment.

As I walked in, I noticed that his entire shop was full of woodworking projects at various stages of completion. "You're really happy here, aren't you?" I asked, as we lifted the bench he was building. "Yes," he replied, "I have much to be thankful for." "Tell me more," I requested. And so we sat down on a couple of boxes, and he shared with me the following story.

"I had a stomach ache that just wouldn't go away. After months of hurting, I went to see my doctor for an examination. Soon I was stripped down and lying on the table in the doctor's office, my internal organs repeatedly probed. Finally, after many oh's and hmm's, he looked up and said: 'You will need to see a specialist at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, tomorrow. I will call a friend there and make an appointment for you.'

"So the next morning, we drove to the Mayo Clinic and I had a four p.m. appointment with a specialist in internal medicine. After he repeated the examination, he left the room. Another specialist returned with the first, and repeated the same exam. This continued until there were four specialists in the room, all probing me at the same time. They left for a consultation and then returned as a group to inform me that I had a large internal growth, which was in imminent danger of blocking my colon, intestines and maybe causing severe internal damage to other

Geery Howe is a consultant and trainer in leadership, management and personal development. Author of Listen to The Heart: The Transformational Pathway to Health and Wellness*, he lives with his family in West Branch, Iowa.*

Tom Dunham

vital organs. They had scheduled me for exploratory internal surgery at seven a.m. the next morning. They suspected that I had an aggressive form of cancer and a small window of time left to live.

"My wife entered the room as the doctors left, and I shared with her the news through tears of grief. We talked for three or four minutes and called the doctors back into the room. Our decision was a simple one and came to us both at the same time. If the window of time was small, then we would like to schedule the surgery in a week and spend that time at our summer cabin in northern Minnesota.

"We drove here that night and arrived just at dusk. Over dinner, we started to talk. You know, Geery, they say that the average American couple only talks together about seven minutes a week. Often partners tell each other what they did that day and that's it. Well, that night we talked for six hours, and at some frightfully late part of the night or early part of the morning, I started calling up my children all over the country. Given all the times they had woken me up when they were babies, the least I could to do was to call them and tell them about this personal challenge.

"I watched the sunrise that morning after having stayed up all night, telling my wife and my children that I loved them deeply. I shared with my family all the feelings, dreams, visions and goals I had been holding in for years and years. I shared with them my fears, hopes and sadness, my grief, pain and sorrow. And then the sun rose and it was a new day. I was tired and refreshed."That week I greeted each new day with prayer, Bible study, and quiet meditation. We visited many dear close friends. One evening I gathered our entire church community together in a circle of prayer, and shared with each of them my fear and joys, my love and blessings. They gathered around me and all laid their hands on me, praying for my recovery. Spontaneously the next night we gathered again, and given what I had said the night before, others came forward and shared about their challenges. For a total of three nights, we shared, prayed, laid on our hands in unconditional love. We hugged each other, heart to heart, eye to eye.

"Then I returned to the hospital. The night before the surgery where I was given a 30 per cent chance of living, the nurse came into the room with a tray with a big needle on it. 'This is to help you sleep before your surgery,' she told me as she lifted the needle off the tray. 'No thank-you,' I replied. 'If this is my last chance to live, I will not wear these goofy gowns, and I will not be put to sleep. I have said and done all I have needed to say and do for the past week. I have left no loose ends behind me. This is my last night, and I plan to pray, call my children and read. My wife will stay with me as long as she wants and will sleep here with me if she would like to.' The nurse left the room and called a supervisor. Finally, I had to sign official papers releasing the hospital from legal obligations if there were to be complications during the night. But I was not to be treated like a disease; I was I and being I was important, since this was potentially my last night alive.

"I did cry, write, pray and call friends that night, and when I greeted the dawn I was again tired and ready. I was not afraid. The nurse returned that morning with another needle on a tray, and told me I had to have this one or surgery would be very painful. But before she gave me the shot, she gently took my hand in hers and said: 'You have great courage and I want to recite the Lord's Prayer with you. I think it will make a difference.' As she spoke, I knew I would not die of cancer and I knew I would recover completely.

That was ten years ago. Last week during my check-up I had no detectable sign of cancer in my body. Yes, I lost most of my colon and other parts of my internal organs. The tumor was intensive and invasive.

I lived through chemo and radiation therapies. But the whole time I knew I was healing. The key is to take a risk and consistently be yourself, not a disease. Have a life and a recovery process, Geery, and wholeness will come forth.

I realized while listening to this story that personal challenges, such as a serious illness, teach one the difference between what is and what is not important. During these times, one's entire belief system and physical system can go through a radical change, a complete re-evaluation of priorities. If you are undergoing such a challenge, be gentle with yourself. When you feel lost and are swamped with too many complex questions, remember, like my friend in Minnesota, that prayer, scripture, quiet meditation and sharing with others are effective resources for achieving clarity. As someone has said: "While curing is about wholeness of body, healing is about wholeness of being."

A SOURCEBOOK FOR THE COMMUNITY OF RELIGIONS
Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, PO Box 1630, Chicago, IL 60690-1630, 240 pages, paperback, $15 plus $2 for shipping

In a short space it would be impossible to even begin to describe the riches in this book. A quick skimming of the contents suggests what's in store for you: Succinct descriptions of the world's religions and what they believe; Moving Toward a Global Ethic; Prayers, Reflections and Teachings from the World's Faith Traditions; Looking Toward the 21st Century; Warnings, Declarations, Visions, and Strategies; The Next Generations . . . the list is endlessly fascinating, and so are the authors. You'll want to keep this book by your bedside for a long time to come. *PW*

THE COURAGE FOR TRUTH: THE LETTERS OF
THOMAS MERTON TO WRITERS
edited by Christine M. Bochen, 1993, Farrar-Straus-Giroux, New York, hardback, 314 pages, $25.00

Thomas Merton, the prophetic writer who spent over two decades as a Trappist monk, corresponded with some three thousand people all over the world. This moving and fascinating collection of letters to over 30 writers, which spans the years from 1948 to 1967, reveals Merton as a man overflowing with the "love of learning and the desire for God." Despite the real affliction he suffered in the monastery over vocational conflicts and ordeals in the area of relationships and censorship, he persevered in the life of prayer. Clearly, the hours he spent each day in vocal, meditative, and contemplative prayer gave him the grace to endure and kept an interior fire burning. Passionately energetic, he published a literary journal, wrote more than fifty books, countless articles, and the endless letters in only twenty years (while teaching and serving as master of novices for his Order). Would Merton have been so prolific had he followed the advice of many friends and left the monastery? Or would the loss of the tension created by monastic life have resulted in a diminished output? That question and many others make this book compelling reading. *MFG*

PEACE LIKE A RIVER

a one hour video cassette covering the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions, CSEC Productions, 332 S Michigan Avenue, Suite 820, Chicago, IL 60604, 800.594.5104, $30.00

This stunning video brings into your home vivid images of the most provocative and inspiring events and speakers at the Parliament, including: The Dalai Lama, Thomas Berry, Brother Wayne Teasdale, Diana Eck, Thich Nhat Hanh, James Forbes, Charlotte Black Elk, Hans Kung, Ravi Singh, Susannah Heschel, and Robert Muller.

The tape captures in rich color the pageantry and celebration, the inclusiveness and openness, and the joy and hope of this gathering as spiritual leaders, teachers and seekers from most of the world's faith traditions think, talk, and pray together about the role of spirituality and religious organizations in the struggle against religious conflicts and violence, poverty and hunger, human rights abuse, and environmental desecration.

Don't miss the opportunity to see the highlights of what many have called the most significant and promising interfaith gathering of our time. *PW*

WORKING THE SPIRIT: CEREMONIES OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

by Joseph M. Murphy, Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 1994, 263 pages, hardback, $25.00

Written by a theology professor at Georgetown University, this book is an important bridge across the wide gap separating black culture from white culture. Murphy seeks to bring to the reader a sense of the beauty and spiritual depth of black religious traditions in Haiti, Brazil, Cuba, Jamaica, and the US, distinct communities which have common roots in Africa.

"Working" the spirit means invoking the spirit in religious rites to bring the human and the divine into relationship. The ceremonies "focus" the spirit, Murphy writes, issuing in significant religious insight and in a mode of human relationships based in service.

Hopefully, this book will foster—among blacks as well as whites and people of all backgrounds—fresh respect for the black contribution to life. *MFG*

We welcome your comments. Please write to The Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542.

Please send me a sample copy of *Fellowship in Prayer,* which here in Haiti is called *Solidarité dans la Prière.* Thank you.

Frantz Francoeur, MD; Port-au-Prince, Haiti

With no idea to whom credit is due for a gift subscription notification card received this week, I am overwhelmed with appreciation; your publication is an experience in spiritual awareness! Someone *must* receive thanks from my heart—so thank you.

Stephanie Spilker; Flagstaff, AZ

The past seven years have been a difficult time for our family. We have endured the loss of a privately owned business, personal bankruptcy, the deaths of several close friends and relatives, and the like. Our lives are not unlike many we know in this unsettled world. We have survived the ordeal and are beginning to recover financially and emotionally. The kindness of *FiP* in sending us the little booklet on a regular basis without cost has been a stabilizing factor for us. I have shared this publication with others and we all find it to be a continual source of strength and inspiration. Accordingly, I'm enclosing a check for $100 which is only a small way of saying "thank you," *FiP,* for being there. Please apply part of this to our regular yearly subscription fee and use the remainder for those who cannot pay.

Name withheld; Mesquite, TX

Reading one of your publications reminded me of Shelley's "To a Skylark." Shelley seemed less interested in "the present and tangible object" than in the "manifestation of something beyond"—(the "blithe spirit" of instinctive joy in existence and the spontaneous expression of that joy).

Your publication manifests the "something beyond" which interested Shelly (and me too!). It's a vitalizing and revolutionary force in the universe for sweeping away what is old and dead and nurturing what is fresh and alive.

Sean K. Dodan; Auburn, NY

Thank you so much for the two copies of *Fellowship in Prayer.* They are so revealing of the Spirit that is moving in all people.

I have read some of the poetry at our noon blessing time.

It's great to be alive in these days and share in the regeneration of humankind. Life can be so meaningful and exciting. Thanks again.

Jim & Grace Moore; British Columbia, Canada

I learned about *Fellowship in Prayer* when our rector, Ted Haddix, used a prayer that was not exclusively Christian and I asked him for a copy.

I attend an amazing church—two demoninations, Episcopal and Presbyterian—two ministers, and somehow we all get along! We hardly know which denomination the other person belongs to. The ministers each do the other's service and alternate the order of worship at the main service. Ted used your prayer in a group called "Accessing the Spiritual." I feel my spiritual needs are truly being met at Indian Hill Church but I'm open to finding new ways of expressing my faith.

Roselyn Rodger; Cincinnati, OH

Someone gave me a copy of *FiP* about six years ago when I was suffering from manic-depression (bi-polar depression). It helped me tremendously through those difficult years when my life was so shattered. All is well now, thank God, and I find even more enjoyment in your publication. It is a spiritual "lift" that is needed. I wish it were published every month.

Name withheld; Chalfont, PA.

I reside at Green Pastures Estates—an Emissary Community in Epping, NH, and have been a part of this spiritual community for over 20 years. Thank you for the complimentary issues of *Fellowship in Prayer*. I've been passing them around to my friends here with appreciation for your work.

Diane Friedman; Epping, NH

I greatly appreciate reading the issues of *FiP* and finding a special inspiration and solace in the wonderful photographs in each copy. Thank you so much.

At this time I cannot contribute the requested $16, but ask to continue receiving the publication, if possible.

Name withheld; Boston, MA

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We welcome articles on prayer, meditation, spiritual experience, religious faith or practices, and similar topics. Preference is given to experiential manuscripts. Manuscripts should not exceed 1500 words, should be typed, double spaced, on 8½ by 11 inch paper, on a 5¼ inch floppy minidisk, 2S/2D, or 2S/HD, or on 3½ HD microdisks, in WordPerfect and sent to The Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542-3227. Please include a brief biography.

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